

# Decline in representative character of winners

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As we gear up to the 15th Lok Sabha poll, we need to ponder over certain broad trends in the electoral process. We should be concerned that on three counts the electoral process falls short of expectations of a democratic system over the years.

The first, fragmentation of polity continues to cause frequent uncertainties (instability) in the functioning of legislative bodies. The second, the representative character of the electoral process has remained static. In fact, the winners of elections, both in the case of Lok Sabha and Assemblies, hardly represent a quarter of total voters. Thirdly, one or the other political party continues to come to and operate in power more or less on party (partisan) lines rather than representing all sections/regions. As a result, inclusiveness of elected governments, credibility of elected leaders and efficiency of their performance for "greater good of the greater

number" is at stake.

With more and more candidates getting elected to Assemblies and Lok Sabha with less than 30 per cent of polled votes, what kind of accountability could be expected from such representatives?. The number of those who got elected with less than 30 per cent of polled votes in Madhya Pradesh, for example, had gone up from 14 in 1991 to 27 in 2008. In the case of Lok Sabha, the number of those who got elected with less than 40 per cent of polled votes had gone up, instead of declining, from six in 1977 to 109 in 2004.

With parties coming to power, as a single large majority, in states winning less than 30 per cent of polled votes (which in fact accounts for hardly one-fifth of all citizens), what kind of governance could be expected?. In a coalition regime, the situation is even more complex. The BJP ruled in Rajasthan coming to power in 2004 with 39 per cent of polled votes. Even in 2008, the Congress came to power in Rajasthan with 36.8 per cent of polled votes. In Madhya Pradesh, too, the BJP came to power in 2004 with 42.5 per cent of votes polled, which, in 2008 Assembly election, had gone down to 37.6 per cent. The BJP came to

## DECLINING REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER: LOK SABHA WINNERS

Won with votes of	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1990	2004
Less than 40% of polled	6	84	28	66	115	170	107	100	109
41 to 50% of polled	62	157	136	160	215	224	257	223	213
More than 50% of polled	474	288	378	303	204	149	179	220	217
Total Seats	542	529	542	529	534	543	543	543	539

power in Karnataka in 2008 with 34 per cent. That was despite the fact that the contest in these states was primarily between two parties.

Despite increased exposure to news media and increased coverage of poll process by news media in the last 10 years, the representative character of elected ones has not improved. In fact, it has declined. What has been the effect of number of news channels which has gone up to more than 100 by 2008. And, what has been the effect of pre-poll surveys and exit polls which, too, have proliferated during this period despite doubtful credentials. Even voter turnout has not improved. The voter turnout declined from 60 per cent in 1977 to 57.5 per cent in the 2004 Lok Sabha poll.

Even the increased "note-for-vote" phenomena across the country and across sections of voters has not enhanced representative character. The per cent of voters who are being paid

## Declining representative character of party in power in key states

State	2000-2004	2005-2008
Rajasthan	39.19 (BJP)	36.8 (INC)
MP	42.50 (BJP)	37.60 (BJP)
Punjab	35.81 (INC)	37.09 (SAD)
Chattisgarh	39.26 (BJP)	40.30 (BJP)
UP	25.41 (SP)	30.43 (BSP)
Bihar	28.34 (RJD)	20.46 (JD(U))
Karnataka	35.27 (INC)	33.86 (BJP)

cash on the eve of polling has been more than one-fourth of voters, according to a recent CMS study. CMS Media Lab, which analyses contents of news channels, has brought out how constrained and "more of the same" phenomena of coverage of news media has been. One-third of the content of news bulletins is about poll campaigns during election season.

I attribute this dilemma of democracy to this phenomena of "pre-emptive journalism" and to "pre-emptive electoral practices". We need to be concerned about these trends of "dampening democracy" instead of deepening democracy.

## Those elected to assembly with less than 30% of votes

State	90-91	93	96-98	02-03	07-08
Rajasthan	12	8	10	11	17
MP	14	10	16	20	27
UP	96	31	19	105	77